

Dear Members of the Education Committee,

My name is Colin Hosten, and I currently serve as Chair of the Board of Education in Norwalk, CT.

I am writing to you today to express my support of H.B. 5283.

While Connecticut is considered among the top 5 states in the country for K-12 education, there are still structural racial and economic disparities between different districts across the state. To fulfill our promise to our community, we need to ensure that ALL students have access to the resources necessary to support their specific learning needs in order to thrive in the classroom and beyond.

Here in Norwalk, 74% of our ~12,000 students identify as students of color (BIPOC), and according to the State Department of Education, Norwalk allocates significantly less funding per student than neighboring towns such as Wilton and Darien, where roughly 20% of their student population are categorized as high needs.

The COVID-19 pandemic only further highlighted the funding gap. We've seen firsthand the impact the pandemic has had on our students and community. A recent Norwalk survey done in 2021, showed that almost half (46.2%) of our high school students reported experiencing depression or symptoms of depression, which is 15% percent higher than the 2019 statewide high school rate, identified by the CT Youth Risky Behavior Survey. With the upcoming loss of ESSER funds, we could see a further reduction in critical mental health support staff when they will be needed the most to curb the impending mental health crisis, especially among our youth.

As someone who serves on our Board of Education, I know that Equity starts with education. I am committed to ensuring that ALL our students get what they need to be successful, and I am grateful that this bill recognizes the need to create a more equitable Connecticut, both racially and socio-economically. Though this bill alone will not completely close the racial funding gap, it does put our state on the right path by beginning the conversation. Thank you for your time today and I urge you to support this bill.

Sincerely,

Colin Hosten

*Chair, Board of Education
Norwalk, CT*